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OFFICIAL-INFORMAL

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Department of State  
Washington, D.C. 20520

ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)

U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS

Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

(X) Release ( ) Excise ( ) Deny

Exemption(s):

Declassify: ( ) In Part (X) In Full

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Date Declassify on Reason

Dear Mac:

We noted in Claus' letter of August 3 an expression of concern that "the Argentines may be cranking up a campaign to try to bamboozle the IAHRC." That, together with other indications of concern about the GOA attitude toward the visit prompt us to write in an attempt to clarify the situation.

The most important point to make is that there is no "GOA attitude" toward the visit. As you will recall, Videla told Newsom in May 1978 that he had decided to invite the Commission. In June, Montes and Allara torpedoed the effort in Washington. In August the Palace sent Cerdá to Washington to work out the details of the visit. The commitment was reconfirmed during the Rome Videla-Mondale conversation and then the Foreign Office tried to torpedo it once again when instructed to draft a note to the Commission. Ultimately the Palace had to draft the note, which the Commission accepted. It was at this point that Minister Arlia went raging through the halls of the Foreign Ministry accusing Videla of treason. That bit of history should be enough to demonstrate that there are many within this government, and not just military, who are opposed to the visit. Despite La Prensa's good record on human rights that paper opposes the visit on grounds of national dignity. Somehow, over a substantial opposition within the military Videla has obtained a commitment to the visit. Given the opposition we know exists we are not at all surprised to see reports such as the one relating to an instruction

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to local officials to stall any Commission inquiries. The reported mutterings of General Menéndez that he could not permit the Commission to set foot on his territory is another example of the reaction of those who are unreconciled to the visit. This sort of response should be expected and not overemphasized.

Putting the visit into perspective, it is interesting to note that it took four months from the time Videla told Newsom of his decision until he could actually get a formal invitation issued. Three months later, in December 1978 the Armed Forces made major changes in their counter-subversive operations which resulted in an abrupt decline in disappearances. (We were always skeptical that the GOA could completely halt disappearances no matter how much it wanted to. We were also skeptical that Ambassador Aja Espil could make what were reportedly categorical promises to Newsom that there would not be a single additional disappearance and if one were to occur the perpetrator would be found and tried. Given recent history here these promises seemed frankly unrealistic.) In the January to May 1979 period, disappearances dropped to low levels and the new prison regulations were promulgated. In May six young people were abducted and it has subsequently been hinted to us that three of them may reappear. A number of sources have told us that the May abduction was an "out of control" operation, and yesterday Ricardo Jofre told us that operation had set off a real "bochinche" within the military and the First Corps. He mentioned that his friend and former boss, General Villareal, the new Deputy in First Corps, had found the Corps a real mare's nest upon taking command in January and had had a terrible time trying to establish order. In July and August the pace of releases, right of option and expulsions finally began to increase. Looking at it over the perspective of the past year, one can make an impressive argument that the prospect of the IAHRC visit has been an important, if not major, cause of the most significant human rights improvements in almost four years. Seen in such a way, the success of the visit assumes the utmost importance.

We continue to receive indications that the Government is committed to the visit and will try to make it success-

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ful. Yesterday, we learned that Ambassador Listre who was rushed off to Costa Rica at the time of the Nicaraguan revolution, will return to Buenos Aires to coordinate the visit. Today's press reports that there will be frequent regular meetings of the Junta and top officials to review preparations for the visit. For me, all of these indications are conclusive there still exists a commitment to a successful visit and it is important that the positive elements in this situation be capitalized upon for support. Exactly what effect upon the politics of military succession the visit will have is still hard to tell. It is of more than passing interest that General Suarez Mason has been trying to improve his image with Ambassador Castro and General MacAuliffe. It may well be, as we are constantly told, that a successful visit will strengthen Videla's hand against the rabid right. What is not clear is what will be seen as "successful" by the various elements of the Argentine military. Some people seem to be telling us they want the visit to be an opportunity to close the door on the past and start over again with a clean slate. It seems unlikely that the Commission's mandate entirely fits in with these hopes.

We are under the clear impression that the Embassy is to maintain ample daylight between itself and the Commission so that the latter does not appear to be our creature. Apparently there was agreement to provide the Commission with the data relating to one presumed disappeared American. At this stage it seems unlikely that we will have data on any specific suspected clandestine prison to provide you, but Ken Sackett has several individual cases he believes are particularly tragic and we hope that means can be found to bring them to the Commission's attention without our hand appearing in it. The case information will be forwarded to you in a separate letter.

Best regards.

Sincerely,

Maxwell Chaplin